

North Brunswick police hit streets to

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MAR 31 1987

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NORTH BRUNSWICK— Township police officers trying to change their pension plan are canvassing neighborhoods in search of registered voters who will allow the question to be placed on the November ballot.

The officers want to switch the 63-man department from the Public Employees' Retirement System to the higher-paying Police & Firemen's Retirement System of New Jersey. The changeover requires a general election vote, which would be held after signed petitions are submitted allowing the question to be placed on the ballot.

The officers' proposed system grants a higher pension at an earlier age, and "encourages a younger, more vigorous department which the public will benefit by," said police officer Kevin McNamara,

chairman of the referendum committee for Policemen's Benevolent Association Local 160, the union representing the department.

The officers also say they are the largest PBA local in the state that still has its pension under the current system.

Mayor Paul Maticera said he is remaining neutral on the issue, but added the PBA should make it known a new pension could affect the municipal budget cap and homeowner taxes.

Under the proposed system, a 55-year-old police officer with 25 years of service would collect 60 percent of his salary following retirement, compared to the current 41.6 percent of his salary.

Under the proposed system, an officer could collect 65 percent of his salary at age 60 and with 25 years of experience. Under the current system, an 60-year-old retiree with 30 years' service would col-

lobby for new pension plan

lect only 50 percent of his salary.

In order to place the pension question before residents, 10 percent of the township's 13,357 registered voters, or 1,336 residents, must sign the petitions by the first week in June.

Signing the petition "is merely the voters and taxpayers asserting their right to decide a public issue," McNamara said. "It's doesn't mean you necessarily support it."

The unresolved question is how much the new pension plan and changeover would cost taxpayers. According to a fact sheet supplied to officers by the state Department of Treasury, taxpayers will pay twice as much into the proposed system as they do into the current plan — from 7.6 percent of salary contribution to 15 percent of salary.

Also, if the new system is instituted, tax-

payers would have to pay the difference for the new pension for each officer in the department from the day they started employment. The taxpayers' portion can be paid either in a lump sum or in yearly installments with interest over 24 years, according to the state.

But neither township officials nor police officers can attach dollar figures to the percentage or changeover costs. If the question is placed on the ballot, state officials would calculate the exact cost of the new system, which must be published in an area newspaper by Sept. 15, McNamara said. A public hearing on the cost estimate and how it would be paid must be held before Oct. 5.

As for the officers' contribution, their percentage-of-salary rate toward the proposed plan would in some cases triple — from 3-8 percent of salary to 7.7-10.6 percent of salary, depending on years of service and social security contributions.

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A story in Tuesday's editions in-
correctly stated the number of
years of service North Brunswick
police would require to receive a
65 percent pension. The officers
require 30 years of service.

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